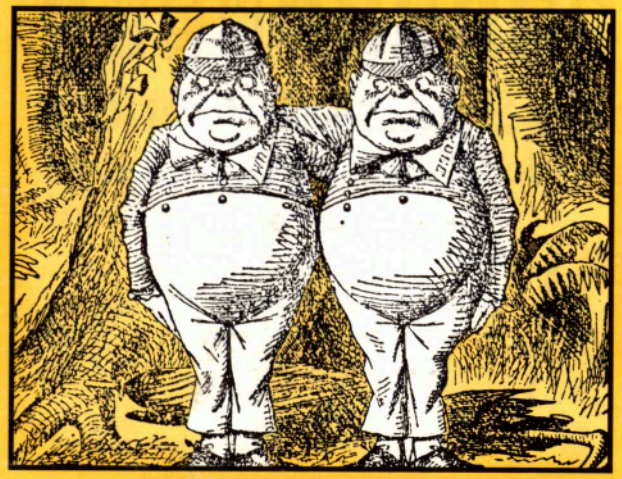

The 1992 Elections:

Is Bill Clinton the lesser evil?

by Paul D'Amato and Lance Selfa

LESS THAN two years ago, in the wake of the Gulf War, George Bush looked like a shoo-in for a second term in the White House. No longer. Today, the Democrats have their best chance to win back the presidency in more than a decade.

As the possibility of getting rid of Bush begins to look real, many people fed up with 12 years of ruthless Republican attacks on workers, women and minorities, and the poor have decided to vote for the conservative Democrat Bill Clinton.

But is a vote for Clinton really a vote for change? This pamphlet shows that, on many issues, Clinton is indistinguishable from, or to the right of, Bush—and that the Democrats have been partners with the Republicans in administering policies of austerity since the 1970s. The power to turn the tide, the authors argue, lies not at the voting booth but in day-to-day struggles—not only for reforms but for a society that meets the people's needs and not the demands of our rulers, served by Democrats and Republicans alike.

An ISO pamphlet

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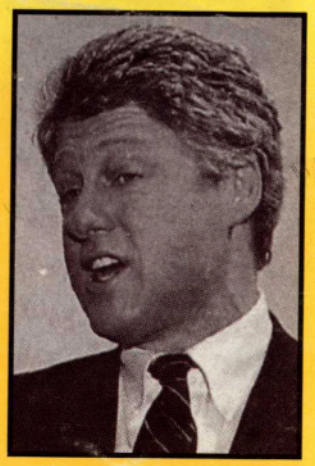

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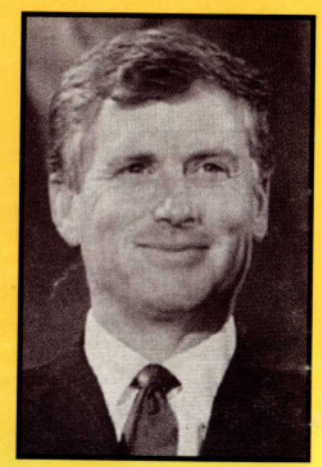
A pamphlet from the International Socialist Organization



1 Introduction

IN THE days and weeks following his brutal victory in the Gulf War in February 1991, George Bush's popularity rating was riding high at 90 percent on promises of a prosperous "New World Order" of peace and security.

Almost two years later, a lot has changed.

Bush's ratings have plummeted to an all-time low of 30 percent.

From former Yugoslavia to Somalia to Peru, Bush's promises of a "New World Order" of peace and prosperity after the fall of the Berlin Wall lie in ruins.

Prosperity proved illusory, as both the U.S. and the world economy began to slide into the worst economic crisis in a decade—producing unemployment rates as high as 9.5 percent in states like California and Michigan.

The 1980s decade, as has become starkly clear to millions of working-class and poor Americans, turned out to be one of prosperity for the very few and poverty for the many.

Over 39 million have no access to health care. Over 3 million are homeless. Millions of poor women already have no access to abortion. One-third of all Blacks live below the poverty line. Wages today buy less than they could in the early 1970s.

And as the Los Angeles rebellion and the videotaped beating of Rodney King showed us, U.S. society metes out much brutality and little justice to Blacks and other minorities.

But Bush's decline in popularity did not produce a groundswell of support for the Democratic Party. Polls taken around the time of the primaries showed that, while people were dissatisfied with Bush, they were not happy with the alternatives.

In a June 1992 *Washinton Post*-ABC News poll, 8 out of 10 surveyed in the U.S. agreed that the two major political parties—Republican and Democratic—are "pretty much out of touch" with the American people. Two-thirds in the same poll considered the formation of a third political party a "good idea."

That Ross Perot, a multi-billionaire conservative who portrayed himself as an "outsider" who could clean up government, produced a three-way deadlock with Bush and Clinton before bowing out of the race in July, is indicative of the levels of frustration with the two-party system.

Perot is out of the race, at least for the time being, and the election has settled back into the old pattern of two-party politics in the U.S.

Many who are fed up with the Reagan-Bush assault on workers, the poor, Blacks and women will be attracted to the idea that the first step in tackling these problems will be to get rid of Bush by electing a Democrat—in this case conservative Democrat Bill Clinton.

The argument, growing in popularity as November approaches, varies from a positive view of Clinton as a candidate who will, to quote an August 1992 letter to the progressive newspaper *In These Times*, make a priority of "national health care, rebuilding the inner cities, working to heal race relations and compassion toward the weak," to the idea that Clinton and the Democrats represent the lesser of two

evils whose election will at least produce some improvement, for example in the area of abortion rights.

As Robin Morgan, editor of *Ms.*, put it to a pro-choice clinic defense mobilization during the week of the Democratic National Convention: "Justice [Harry] Blackmun's age alone tells you what you have to do in the presidential race, even if you have to hold your nose."

Similar sentiments have propelled Democratic presidents to office in the past, from Roosevelt to Kennedy to Carter.

But a closer look at Clinton and the Democrats—their proposed policies today, as well as their record in office—reveals a party whose policies differ little from the Republicans.

2 Who Is Bill Clinton?

ARKANSAS GOV. Bill Clinton and Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) say they're for change after 12 long years of Republican rule. The press describes them as "new voices for a new generation." They regularly ask audiences of voters to "give us a chance."

They promise to protect a woman's right to choose abortion, to provide affordable health care, and to stop the Republican attacks on education and the social program safety net.

All of this sounds good. But talk is cheap. And the candidates' background and records would suggest that a Clinton administration would do little to help ordinary Americans.

Clinton, along with Gore, is a leader of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a right-wing caucus of the Democratic Party formed in 1985. The DLC, most of whose members represent the conservative Southern wing of the party, was a direct response to the Democrats' failed 1984 campaign. Clinton chaired the DLC in 1990 and 1991.

The DLC sought to rally the forces of the Democrats' right wing against labor and minorities. Accepting Reagan's charge that labor, minorities and women represent "special interests," the DLC pushed the Democrats to distance themselves from these liberal constituencies.

The DLC's plan called for the Democrats to change their appeal by adopting Republican themes of "family values," "a strong defense," "welfare reform" and pro-business positions as the Democrats' own.

The pro-business slant in the DLC's program was no accident. In fact, major corporations like AT&T, RJR Nabisco and Phillip Morris Cos. paid $3,000 to $25,000 a piece to underwrite the DLC's 1991 convention, to which Jesse Jackson was not invited. Many of those who attended the meeting, the first "cattle call" showcasing potential Democratic candidates for president in 1992—including Clinton and Gore—were corporate lobbyists.

Clinton's and Gore's position at the top of the 1992 ticket represents a triumph of the DLC's strategy to out-Republican the Republicans.

"I noted with interest Bill Clinton's 'New Covenant' speech," Bush domestic policy planner James Pinkerton said in 1991. "It seems to me that a Republican could take that speech, change about ten words, and have a pretty good message for the GOP primaries, not to mention the general election."

Clinton looks to have taken the unsolicited advice from Pinkerton—the man who, as director of "opposition research" for Bush in 1988, dredged up the Willie Horton case to discredit Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis. Clinton made the "new covenant" the central theme of his 1992 convention acceptance speech.

Clinton says he wants to "put the people first." But his career and campaign shows that, for him, rich people will be first in line.

During most of his primary campaign, he made a "tax cut for the middle class"

a central theme. In July, he discarded the tax cut, adopting an "investment-oriented" economic plan instead.

This shift was calculated with his support from business—rather than with "the people" in mind. He continues to support a tax cut for capital gains for small businesses, a position compatible with Bush's.

In their campaign bus tours, Clinton and Gore constantly chided Reagan-Bush policies for promoting the greatest concentration of wealth in the U.S. this century. But only a few weeks before the Democratic convention, Clinton was singing a different tune for *Business Week*. "People who work on Wall Street are good citizens who want to see their country change," Clinton told the magazine. "I want to generate a lot of millionaires. . ."

Like Bush, Clinton opposes the use of quotas for affirmative action. And like his well-known Republican gubernatorial colleagues John Engler of Michigan and Pete Wilson of California, he supported in Arkansas "welfare reform" which requires welfare recipients to work and which cuts off parents of children who miss school.

He advocates "boot camps" for young criminal offenders and school dropouts. Even in the wake of the Rodney King verdict, he has pledged to hire 100,000 new cops. Taking a page from Bush's 1988 campaign book, he poses for photos with dozens of cops.

Clinton supports the death penalty—a stance he illustrated by leaving the New Hampshire campaign trial in February to supervise personally the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally disabled Black man.

Though Clinton and Gore have gathered the support of major labor unions, it isn't because either of them are "friends of labor." In fact, unionists booed Clinton at a Rainbow Coalition meeting in January when he endorsed anti-union right-to-work laws, like the one in his home state Arkansas.

In a campaign speech, Clinton endorsed "whipsawing," a practice by which unionized plants compete with each other to offer wage and work-rule concessions to win business investment.

He has pledged that his administration would lay off 100,000 government workers. In 1990, Clinton rushed approval of a $200,000 state loan to an Arkansas auto parts supplier. He knew the company would use the money to build up inventory to break a United Auto Workers strike.

No wonder former candidate Jerry Brown won support from many unionists when he called Clinton a *"scab-herding," "union-busting"* politician.

Bill Becker, the president of the Arkansas AFL-CIO, was even harsher:

"Bill Clinton is mainly the friend of big business," said Becker. "Labor has backed him some in the past, true, but only because he's been the lesser of two evils in a right-to-work state in the Deep South. Everytime he's claimed to be our friend, we've ended up with a knife in the back."

It is a sign of the misplaced hope that some have put in a Clinton presidency that Becker recently reversed himself: "In my opinion, Bill Clinton has the potential to be one of our greatest presidents. . . I know the sorry record of George Bush. He is no friend of labor. I also know Bill Clinton. He is a friend of labor."

Clinton's Arkansas

PERHAPS THE strongest argument against a vote for Clinton is his record as Arkansas governor.

Arkansas is one of the poorest states in the country. Twenty percent of the state's

population lives below the official U.S. government poverty line, compared to the national average of 14 percent. One-quarter of Arkansans live without medical health insurance, compared to a figure of one in seven Americans.

For the state's Black residents, figures are much worse. The rate of Black unemployment stands at 17.5 percent, the highest of five Deep South states. And infant mortality rates in the poorest rural (and predominantly Black) counties are higher than those in Cuba, French Guiana and Malaysia.

As governor for all but two years between 1979 and 1992, Clinton can certainly take a large share of blame for these appalling figures. He is not simply a victim of the circumstance that he presided over a poor state when federal aid was being chopped. For many of his policies have made life *worse* for ordinary Arkansans.

In Arkansas, he has continued to support increases in the state's sales taxes, which penalize the poor more than the rich.

In 1983, Clinton worked for the Arkansas state legislature's support in raising the sales tax from 3 percent to 4 percent. The Arkansas Fairness Council, a coalition of labor groups, Blacks, women's organizations and others, asked Clinton to exempt food from the tax increase. He refused.

Despite the fact that Arkansas is one of the poorest states in the U.S., only 3 percent of Arkansas residents receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments, lower than the national average of 5 percent. The Clinton administration has a hand in writing eligibility requirements for AFDC.

Arkansas and Alabama are the only two states without a civil rights bill banning discrimination in hiring or housing.

Clinton sells Arkansas as a low-wage, non-union state to business investors. Black activists have also charged that the administration deliberately steers investors to the predominantly white northwest part of the state—away from the poor, predominantly Black Delta region.

Clinton denied the charges of "steering." But in 1990, when activists sought state records to investigate if a Japanese firm had been steered to the northwest part of the state, Clinton supported tightening citizens' access to government records.

The costs of Clinton's pro-business policies are two-fold. First, over one-fifth of the state budget, more than $200 million a year, is lost to government tax handouts to corporations. The Clinton administration has made up this shortfall by raising sales and income taxes, which hit the poorest Arkansans the hardest.

Between 1981 and 1991, Arkansas sales and income taxes have increased by 151 percent each. During that same time, corporate taxes have increased by only 65 percent. The liberal watchdog group Citizens for Tax Justice say the state taxes the poor more than the rich by a ratio of 1.7 to 1. Taxes have grown more regressive under Clinton.

Second, the environmental costs are enormous. Arkansas' major industry, agriculture (like Tyson's chicken farms), is polluting the state's river system and drinking water. Clinton supports "voluntary" industry compliance with environmental regulations, a policy modeled on the Bush administration's.

As one Clinton aide said: "The governor likes a lot of the work [Bush-appointed Environmental Protection Agency administrator] Bill Reilly has done." An Arkansas environmentalist disagreed, saying: "The water sheds are degraded. The top soil is washing off. Wildlife is disappearing. The voluntary rules aren't working."

What of Clinton's supposed "big success," education policy? Here, the record is hardly stellar. Between 1979 and today, Arkansas has moved from dead-last to 46th

in the ranking of teachers' salaries and from 50th to 48th in per pupil spending. About one-half of Arkansas high school graduates attend college, up from only one-third a decade ago, but fully three of four graduates need remedial work in their first year of college.

Clinton supports standardized tests for teachers and students, neither of which improves learning or teaching. And his limited school "choice" plan allows parents of students in wealthy schools to veto poor students "choice" to attend them. So much for free choice!

While the Democratic Party Convention gave some verbal support to some pro-gay stances on some issues, Clinton's Arkansas record shows where he really stands on lesbian and gay rights.

Arkansas has no anti-discrimination law or executive order, nor has Clinton ever supported one. Moreover, it is one of several states which still has an anti-sodomy law.

While Clinton claims to oppose mandatory HIV testing in all cases, Arkansas requires contact tracing for people with the HIV virus, and allows doctors to test patients without their consent.

Arkansas Gay and Lesbian Task Force Chair Dave Harris is not impressed with Clinton's record, saying, "[We] have been quite surprised by the news from around the country that our governor is very supportive of our civil rights. In this state, he has never publicly said the words 'gay' or 'lesbian,' and every time we have approached the governor's office, we have been rebuffed."

3 Will a Democrat in the White House Make a Difference?

EVEN THOSE who may agree with criticisms of Clinton's and Gore's records will still argue that a Clinton/Gore administration will make a difference, especially on issues like abortion and health care.

Both Clinton and Gore have campaigned hard for the pro-choice vote. But abortion supporters shouldn't think that either Democrat is committed to defending abortion rights.

Only six years ago, Clinton wrote to an Arkansas anti-abortion activist: "I am opposed to abortion and to government funding of abortions. We should not spend state funds on abortions because so many people believe abortion is wrong."

The state of Arkansas denies abortion funding to poor women, including those who are victims of rape or incest. In 1989, Clinton signed a law requiring girls under age 18 to notify a parent before having an abortion.

Gore's record on abortion is even more checkered. Though he claims to have always supported the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, he voted for the Human Life Amendment to the Constitution in 1984 and supported a bill reading "a right to abortion is not secured by the Constitution of the U.S." in 1987.

While a member of the House of Representatives, Gore voted to restrict abortion 27 times (against 5 pro-choice votes).

Many activists hope that a President Clinton will appoint Supreme Court justices who won't pander to the far right in the way the Reagan-Bush appointees have. Clinton may or may not appoint more liberal justices. His Arkansas judicial appointments show no consistent pattern.

But focusing on Supreme Court appointments ignores where social change comes from. A Court stacked with Nixon appointees (including Justice Blackmun) decided *Roe v. Wade* after the women's liberation movement mobilized for abortion rights.

Even the current reactionary Court drew back from overturning *Roe* in June's *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision because it feared, in Justice Souter's words, a loss of "legitimacy." In other words, it feared unleashing the power of a pro-choice mobilization.

There is no necessary correlation between the party of the president who appoints judges and the decisions they will render. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court cases which upheld the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War and the imprisonment of those whose only "crime" was membership in the Communist Party were decided when liberal pro-New Deal Democratic majorities ruled the court.

Moreover, the 1986 Supreme Court decision which upheld state laws criminalizing homosexual (and heterosexual) "sodomy" was written by Kennedy appointee Justice Byron White.

Clinton campaigns as the candidate for "change" after a decade of greed and corruption. But on the few parts of his domestic policy on which he differs from

Bush, the "change" he advocates won't begin to clean up the 1980s' mess.

Clinton and Gore pledge to raise taxes on the rich—a position the majority of Americans support. Yet they call for only a 2 percent increase on the wealthiest taxpayers. Even if a Clinton administration won that tax increase, the rich would pay taxes at less than one-half the rate they did in 1979.

Clinton and Gore pledge "affordable health care for all"—another position the vast majority of Americans support. But Clinton doesn't support a national health care plan like Canada's or Britain's. He endorses a "play or pay" plan which requires employers to buy insurance for their workers or to pay into a taxpayer-supported fund to buy insurance for the uninsured.

Because Clinton's program leaves wide latitude for "market forces," health care costs would continue to skyrocket because they would still be subject to the profit motive and rationed by price. Such a plan would be little more than a subsidy to the insurance industry, one of the Democratic Party's main corporate benefactors.

One policy that won't change if Clinton wins is U.S. foreign policy. It's not simply that differences on foreign policy between Republicans and Democrats are narrower to begin with, but if anything Clinton's foreign policy will be to the *right* of George Bush's.

Clinton, like his running mate, Gore, supported Bush's war in the Persian Gulf. But they criticize Bush for not having overthrown Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War.

They criticize the Bush administration for being too harsh in pressuring Israel to curtail settlements on Arab land. They criticize Bush for being too slow to intervene militarily in Yugoslavia. They criticize Bush for not being forceful enough with Cuba.

St. Petersburg Times columnist Jack R. Payton was on to something when he wrote a column entitled "Democrats' foreign policy looks a lot like the GOP's." Wrote Payton: "Clearly this is a new Democratic Party, one that in foreign policy comes across almost as Republican as the Republicans. The differences are there, but you have to look carefully to find them."

In fact, the Clinton-Gore ticket's proposed foreign policy is so right-wing that the ticket won endorsement from some leading neoconservative hawks, many of whom supported President Ronald Reagan.

Among the Clinton-Gore endorsers are Paul Nitze, former Reagan adviser and one of the chief planners of the Vietnam War; Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, author of the theory that Western countries experienced too much democracy during the 1960s; Edward N. Luttwak, director of geo-economics, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

As they wrote in an August 17 *New York Times* ad, Clinton has "[t]aken the lead in urging international action—including, if necessary, the use of U.S. air and naval forces—in support of UN relief efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina." They added that Clinton "has resisted those at home—and in his own party—who propose reckless cuts in our national defense."

Whatever happened to the "peace dividend?"

4 Servants of the Rich

THE 1980s was a period of growing reaction in the U.S.—a period in which the rich got richer and the poor got poorer, abortion rights were attacked, racism was on the rise and unions were devastated.

It was a period of wealth transfer from the bottom of society to the top of society unparalleled since the late 19th century—the era of the Robber Barons.

Real wages fell by 9 percent from 1977 to 1987, and continue to decline. Yet the number of billionaires in the U.S. went up 14 times. Average CEO salaries were 34 times higher than the average workers' wage in the 1950s. By 1992, that figure had shot up to 160 times.

Between 1981 and 1988, the wealthiest enjoyed a decline in their tax rate from 70 percent to 28 percent. Meanwhile, those classified as the "working poor" saw their taxes increase by 22 percent.

At the same, the average pay for Blacks declined from 63 percent of whites pay in 1975 to 56 percent in 1991.

Massive military spending was coupled with massive cuts in social spending.

Much of this happened under Republican presidents, but the process actually began in the late 1970s under Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

Carter was elected in a period when the U.S. ruling class, reeling from the defeat in Vietnam and the onset of long-term economic crisis and decline in the mid-1970s, were looking for policies to restore profitability and roll back the gains of the 1960s. Both parties came to their aid.

Carter met regularly with members of the Business Roundtable, an organization of top businessmen. A DuPont executive on the Roundtable said that Carter "is accessible. He talks. We have no trouble getting ourselves heard." The *New York Times* wrote, "In fact, big business has the ear of Jimmy Carter, Democrat, to a greater degree than was true of Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford, Republicans."

In his campaign, Carter pledged to work for the interests of workers, Blacks and women, and then proceeded to thumb his nose at them once he took office.

Carter increased the military budget by 5 percent and created the Rapid Deployment Force for quick military interventions anywhere around the world. He also introduced registration for the military draft for all 18-year-old men.

Carter implemented severe cutbacks in social spending. He deregulated the airline and trucking industry, and reduced the capital gains tax on the rich from 48 percent to 28 percent. At the same time, he boosted Social Security taxes for the poor.

Carter also began the assault on unions. In 1978, he negotiated the Chrysler bailout plan that exacted over a billion dollars in concessions from Chrysler workers and in the same year invoked the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act to break the national miners' strike.

The "common situs" picketing bill, which allowed construction workers to picket worksites, was defeated in 1977 with the swing votes of 11 Democrats who

two years previously had been for its passage, and who earned a total of more than $160,000 in business contributions for their change of heart.

And it was a plan drawn up by Carter's administration that Reagan used to bust the Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) strike in 1980.

Carter endorsed the Hyde Amendment which cut off federal funding allowing poor women to obtain abortions, responding to critics that,

> there are many things in life that are not fair, that wealthy people can afford and poor people can't. But I don't believe the federal government should take action to try to make these opportunities exactly equal, particularly when there is a moral factor involved.

In 1978, when the Supreme Court made its landmark *Bakke* decision which set in motion a decade of attacks on affirmative action programs, the Carter administration filed a brief against affirmative action.

The process accelerated when Reagan was elected. Sensing the favorable climate, business leaders joined in an "orgy of lobbying" in Washington to press for more tax cuts. Corporate Political Action Committees (PACs), designed to funnel funds to sympathetic congressmen, mushroomed from 89 in 1974 to 1,467 in 1982.

Democrats and Republicans alike set out on a bidding war, each party trying to outdo the other in inventing tax breaks.

Reagan's 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act and his 1982 Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Tax Act, which reduced corporate taxes from 33 to 16 percent, were widely supported by both houses of Congress. More than half of House Democrats voted in favor, as did more than 80 percent of Democrats in the Senate.

When Reagan's 1981 budget cuts wiped out years of social welfare gains, he received unanimous endorsement from the Senate Budget Committee, including the votes of Democratic Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (N.Y.), Gary Hart and liberals Howard Metzenbaum (Ohio) and Donald Riegle (Mich.).

These economic moves were matched by a growing ideological shift to the right in the Democratic Party, eager as it was to slough off its image as a liberal party beholden to "special interests"—read workers, Blacks and women. The image was useful as a means to garner the popular vote in the 1960s, but a growing number of Democratic leaders began to see it as a liability.

Better to *take for granted* votes from Blacks and labor, while appealing to the white middle-class vote that had swung toward the Republicans.

Among the signers of a 1979 document of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress which endorsed supply-side economics in 1979 were not only conservative Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, but also liberals Edward Kennedy and George McGovern. The Brookings Institute, a liberal think-tank behind the Democratic Party, was described in 1984 by *Industry Week* as "sounding more like Ronald Reagan every day."

5 A Record of Deception

THE DEMOCRATS and Republicans are not identical parties. But they complement each other, as the twin parties of capitalism. Historically, the Democrats have used populist rhetoric in order to diffuse social movements and garner mass support in times of social discord.

Depression-era Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt understood this role well, saying that "those who have property [fail] to realize that I am the best friend the profit system ever had."

FDR's New Deal, a package of reforms from Social Security to recognizing the right of workers to form unions, came on the heels of the worst crisis capitalism had yet faced. Roosevelt's policies were an attempt to avert revolt from below through reforms from above.

As a leader of the American Federation of Labor put it to Congress in 1932. "I say to you, gentlemen, advisedly, that if something is not done... the doors of revolt in this country are going to be thrown open." The New Deal was a response to this.

In the same way, welfare spending for the poor increased following the ghetto rebellions in the mid-1960s.

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that the Democrats equal reform and the Republicans equal retrenchment. To begin with, historically reforms have been won through mass struggle—regardless of who has been in office.

The coincidence of mass struggle on the one hand and Democrats in office on the other says more about the means by which Democrats appealed to the electorate than about the party's commitment to Blacks, women or labor.

In the 1930s, as well as the 1960s, mass strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins pressured the government to grant reforms. At the same time, Democratic presidential hopefuls Roosevelt and later, Johnson—neither known to be particularly liberal before their elections—tapped into mass discontent by means of populist rhetoric.

This has helped to reinforce the illusion that the Democratic Party stands for "the people."

Moreover, the New Deal reforms of the 1930s were not dismantled when the Republican Eisenhower took office in the 1950s, and all sections of business supported Johnson's Great Society reforms as a means of keeping their power, not dismantling it.

Since the mid-1970s, the Democrats' rhetoric has shifted rightward.

This is because Democratic governments—as much as their Republican counterparts—are committed to maintaining a "good business climate." In times of economic expansion, this means confining social welfare expenditures and programs within business-defined limits. In times of economic contraction, this means cutting back on welfare spending and attacking working-class living standards.

The Republicans are more openly conservative and pro-business. But the Democrats have a record of saying one thing to get elected and doing another in office.

The best example is Lyndon Johnson's campaign of 1964. Then the "lesser evil" argument had even greater appeal than today. In 1992, Clinton and Bush, for instance, both support intervention against Iraq (Clinton stands to the right of Bush on intervention in Bosnia) and both oppose quotas for affirmative action. In the 1964 campaign, by contrast, the two candidates were polarized over intervention in Vietnam and support for civil rights.

Pitted against Barry Goldwater, a right-wing, segregationist, pro-war Republican, Johnson cast himself as the pro-civil rights, anti-war candidate who would not escalate the fighting in Vietnam.

Johnson even ran an ad for his campaign which showed a young girl holding a flower and then a nuclear mushroom cloud—the implicit warning was that voting for Goldwater was voting for certain war.

Whole sections of the anti-war movement took the position of "half the way with LBJ," believing that Johnson couldn't possibly be as bad as Goldwater.

Once elected, Johnson proceeded to escalate the war beyond anyone's dreams. After fabricating a pretext for intervention known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Johnson increased troop presence in Vietnam from the 15,000 sent under Kennedy to 184,000 by the end of 1965, and to over 500,000 by 1968.

By the end of Johnson's term, the U.S. had already dropped more tonnage of bombs on Vietnam—a country the size of Texas—than all the tonnage dropped in the Second World War.

Johnson, in 1965, also sent 20,000 troops to the Dominican Republic to prevent a popular uprising from ousting a pro-U.S. government.

Today, the "lesser evil" party makes no pretense that its foreign policy will be different from Bush's.

The Democrats stood behind Reagan when he invaded the tiny island of Grenada, and behind Bush when he invaded Panama. "I support the president in this circumstance and I think the Congress will as well," said Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) after Bush sent 24,000 troops into Panama.

Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale promised as part of his campaign to "quarantine" Nicaragua—a position at the time to the right of Reagan.

Democrats lined up behind Bush again during the war against Iraq. The initial Democratic "opposition" to Bush's drive to war was not that the U.S. had no right to police the world for oil interests, but that intervention should be delayed to allow time to "let sanctions work." Moreover, shortly before operation Desert Storm was launched, the entire Congress, save five, voted for the "Commander-in-Chief resolution," which gave Bush the green light to begin the attack.

"We have to say that President Bush was right to kick Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait," Clinton said at one of the earliest candidate debates in New Hampshire.

This should come as no surprise. Apart from the last decade, every war launched by the U.S. has begun with a Democratic president in office. That's because the Democrats are as committed to U.S. imperialism—its right to police the world in its own interests—as the Republicans.

The Democratic Party platform is unequivocal on this point. It reads, "America is the world's strongest military power, and we must remain so...The U.S. must be prepared to use military force decisively when necessary to defend our vital interests."

Imperialism is a time-honored Democratic tradition. It was the *Truman* Doc-

trine, after all, which asserted the U.S. government's right to intervene anywhere in the world to protect its interests in the name of fighting "communism."

Turning Its Back on Labor

ORGANIZED LABOR has tied its fortunes politically to the Democratic Party since the 1930s and the New Deal.

Despite strong sentiment for a labor party among workers throughout the '30s and '40s, AFL-CIO leaders consistently steered support toward the Democrats. In the 1940s, the CIO created CIO-PAC in order to funnel money to the Democrats. They might as well have thrown the money down a well.

More than anything, these efforts have served to feed the cruel illusion that the Democratic Party somehow represents the interests of organized labor.

But CIO-PAC is no match for big business—either in terms of the money it is able to funnel to the party or the role of "advisor" it plays to the Democrats.

In 1988, the Democrats got $31 million in business PAC money—$7 million more than they got from organized labor. And dollar-for-dollar, business made the better investment. For the millions of dollars of AFL-CIO funds that have poured into the Democratic coffers have produced little in the way of pro-union legislation.

Through the late 1970s and 1980s—a period when the amount of AFL-CIO PAC money going to the Democrats went up—workers faced the worst decline in conditions and union membership since the 1920s.

In the current Democratic Party platform, the section on labor reads like an employee handbook. It admonishes U.S. workers "to accept added responsibilities in the new economy," and to "be prepared to join in cooperative efforts to increase productivity, flexibility and quality." This is a cruel joke in today's economic situation of unemployment, low wages, long hours and harsh working conditions.

This is not a product of the Democrat's recent turn to the right. The past history of the Democrats show that they have always acted against the interests of labor.

The Democrats have always been a party of strike-breaking. In 1935 alone, 20 state militias, the majority of them called up under Democratic governors, were used against strikers in 73 disputes. In 1943, a Democratic Congress passed the Smith-Connolly Act which empowered the president to break strikes in war-related industries. More than 190 of the 209 Democrats who voted for the act received money from union PACs.

President Harry Truman—touted today by George Bush as a man in whose footsteps he is following—was elected in 1946 by projecting himself as a "friend of labor." The AFL-CIO PACs poured millions into his campaign. Yet once in office, he dropped his promise to repeal the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act, and used the Act to break strikes 12 times in his first year in office.

This has been a consistent pattern. The AFL-CIO pours millions into the campaigns of Democratic candidates, who pay lip service to the labor movement and then turn their backs on it once in office. The only difference today is that Clinton—governor of an anti-union "right-to-work" state—pays even less lip service.

The Democrats and Racism

"THE LIKELIHOOD of a Democratic victory in the presidential election will provide Blacks with an opportunity for greater involvement in governance than we have now, and I fully expect that Clinton will deliver in our interests."

So Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) said to a prominent Black newspaper in New York. She typifies the many Black Democrats who have swung behind the Clinton campaign.

This is the same Clinton who denounced the rap singer Sister Souljah at a Rainbow Coalition conference in order to distance himself from Jesse Jackson. The same Clinton who, as head of the Democratic Leadership Council, has steered the party clear of taking on issues of racism in order not to alienate white suburban voters. The same Clinton who has called for "boot camps" for first-time drug offenders.

The L.A. rebellion brought the questions of racism and massive inequality to the fore. Polls after the riots showed that 65 percent of Blacks and over 50 percent of whites thought the rebellion "understandable." But the Clinton campaign assiduously sidestepped these issues, preferring to play the safe "suburban strategy."

"People are looting because they are not part of the system at all anymore," said Clinton after the L.A. rebellion. "They do not share our values and their children are growing up in a culture alien to ours. . ." Now the L.A. rebellion is barely mentioned by either candidate.

But even before the party's right turn, the Democrats showed little commitment to fighting racism.

President Jimmy Carter fuelled racism during his campaign for the presidency and his term in office. For example, on the question of busing, he said, "I see nothing wrong with ethnic purity being maintained. I would not force racial integration of a neighborhood by government action." For his attorney general, Carter chose Dixiecrat Griffin Bell, who refused to enforce federal civil rights legislation. Bell's staff approved 99 percent of requests to redraw the boundaries of more than 20,000 Southern political jurisdictions to preserve white voting majorities.

The Democrats' relationship to the mass civil rights movement that began in the late 1950s is even more revealing. When millions of Blacks began to fight against Jim Crow segregation and for voting rights, the Democratic Party tried to straddle a very difficult line—between granting limited reforms and maintaining an alliance with the racist white Southern wing of the party, the "Dixiecrats."

The civil rights movement threatened that alliance. For a period, the party looked to the new Black vote to provide the margin of victory in a presidential race. It was on this basis that the Democrats moved to become the "party of civil rights." But the party sought to diffuse the mass struggle and channel it into voting.

In the midst of the 1961 Freedom Rides, in which civil rights workers rode buses through the South to force integration, the Kennedy administration created the Voter Education Project and tried to convince activists to stick to voter registration. "Why don't you guys quit all that shit—freedom riding and sitting-in shit—and concentrate on voter registration," Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy told civil rights activist James Farmer in 1961. "If you guys do that, I'll get you tax-free status."

The huge growth in the number of Black elected officials—from about 100 in 1964 to over 7,500 today, including the mayors of most major U.S. cities—is one of the most visible results of the Black struggles of the 1960s. It is also perhaps the best argument against a Democratic electoral strategy for getting rid of racism.

Despite the growth in officials, conditions for Blacks in the U.S. today are in many respects worse than in the 1960s. For example, about one-quarter of Blacks lived below the poverty line in the late 1960s. Today, one-third live below the poverty line.

In city after city, Black mayors have acted as trustworthy custodians for austerity and law-and-order on behalf of business interests. A layer of Black middle-

class professionals and politicians, who have a stake in the system, has been created.

It was Tom Bradley, the Black mayor of Los Angeles, who called in the National Guard to quell the rebellion that followed the verdict in the Rodney King case. "I will enforce the law," he said just hours after an all-white jury exonerated the four white policemen who savagely beat Rodney King.

In 1974, Atlanta's first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson won high praise from Atlanta's largely white business establishment for crushing a strike of the city's sanitation workers, most of whom were Black.

In 1985, Wilson Goode, the first Black mayor of Philadelphia, ordered the aerial firebombing of a Black countercultural group which had had repeated clashes with the city's police. The ensuing blaze gutted dozens of blocks in Philadelphia's Black neighborhood.

The story of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition reveals better than anything the utter bankruptcy of the idea that the Democratic Party can somehow be transformed. In practice, Jackson did little more than provide a "progressive" cover for a party which has been steadily moving rightward. In 1984, and again in 1988, Jackson, ostensibly building a movement from the grassroots, delivered his supporters to Mondale and then to Dukakis.

Moreover, the closer Jackson tied himself to the party, the more conservative his rhetoric became. "My position on drugs is not way to the left, [nor is] my position on educational reinvestment," he said in 1988. "When all the dust clears away, my positions are consistent with the Constitution, Congress, and ultimately the way the nation turns."

In reality, Jackson has always been a politician of the mainstream, committed to upholding the system from which he benefits. "The interests of American business and the American people are mutual and inseparable," he said in 1987.

Today, there is mass Black disillusionment in an electoral system which has given nothing to them. An estimated 22 million mostly Black inner-city voters sat out the 1988 elections. In the recent primaries, Black voter turnout was 25 percent below its level in 1988, when Jackson ran in the primaries.

And yet, as former Jackson campaign aide Ron Daniels put it, "Black politicians and political leaders have made an uncritical scramble to embrace any Democratic candidate who just appears 'electable,'" This strategy has achieved nothing for the majority of poor and working-class Blacks.

6 Is Bill Clinton the Lesser Evil?

THE DAY before the start of the Democratic Convention in July, major Democratic Party leaders from Congress, states and business gathered to board a "Victory Train" which went from Washington to New York City.

The train ride, touted by the DNC as an opportunity for "meeting new acquaintances, catching up with old friends or enjoying the scenery through the glass wall of the special observation car," feted lawyers and lobbyists at $10,000 a ticket. It also reserved seats for any donor who had given $25,000 to the party.

Meanwhile, in the week leading up to the convention, New York City police conducted a massive sweep of the Madison Square Garden area to clear it of homeless people.

"Two years ago," said Peter Smith, president of the non-profit Partnership for the Homeless, "I got a commitment from Ron Brown, the chairman of the Democratic Party that there would be no sweeps during the convention. That was the first commitment the party made, and they broke it. How can we trust them to keep their word on anything else?"

These two events pose starkly the reality of what the Democratic Party actually stands for in U.S. politics.

For despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Democratic Party is a party of the rich —led by the rich, paid for and supported by major business interests.

That *both* parties serve and are served by the rich is brought home by looking at the funding that flows to them.

Throughout the 1980s, the Democrats bid for, and obtained, almost as much corporate PAC money as the Republicans. In 1984, for example, business PACs handed Republicans $23.6 million and Democrats $20.7 million.

Whole industries have traditionally been considered in the Democratic fold: the oil and gas industry, real estate, insurance and investment banking. In 1986, trade associations representing the savings and loan, real estate and mortgage banking industries gave more money to the Democrats than to the Republicans.

Before he stepped out of the race, Ross Perot said that he was willing to spend $200 million to win the presidency. And why not? Elections in the U.S. have always been bought.

It costs over $200,000 to run a race for the House of Representatives. A Senate race costs more than $1.5 million. The cost of a presidential campaign is approaching $100 million. Little wonder then, that there are 28 millionaires in the Senate, according to *Harpers Index*. Of that number, 21 are Democrats.

The result is a Congress and a White House that should have inscribed on their doors: "province of the wealthy—no workers admitted."

The reality is not missed by business itself. During the 1988 Bush-Dukakis race, a Bank of Boston analyst commented that Wall Street didn't view the outcome of the election with any great significance.

In periods of economic crisis, the room for reform shrinks. The disparity be-

tween Democratic image and reality becomes more glaring.

An effort to restructure the system—by driving down living standards and shifting wealth to the ruling class—was made by the bosses of every major industrial country, regardless of which party was in power over the last years. Whether it was conservatives like Reagan and Britain's Thatcher, or those who preached social reform like France's Mitterrand and Greece's Papandraeu, governments facing economic crisis implemented policies that attacked workers and favored the rich.

In fact, government is set up to represent the interests of the few over the many. Whether liberals, conservatives or labor parties are in office, they manage a system that depends on upholding the profit motive at all costs. Former President Woodrow Wilson put it well when he said:

> Suppose you go to Washington and try to get at your government. You will always find that while you are politely listened to, the men really consulted are the men who have the big stake—the big bankers, the big manufacturers, and the big masters of commerce. . .The masters of the Government of the United States are the combined capitalists and manufacturers of the United States.

In other words, whichever party is in office, the interests of business are served. That two parties, both committed to capitalism and the profit motive, take turns in office, is one of the greatest sources of political stability in the U.S.

That's why our rulers cling so tightly to the two-party system and attack any effort that represents a break from it—even when it comes from one of their own, a multi-billionaire like Ross Perot.

"It takes two wings to fly an airplane," Jesse Jackson once said. In the U.S. political system, each wing—Democrat and Republican—helps to fly the same, pro-capitalist plane.

As conservative analyst Kevin Phillips wrote:

> Part of the reason that U.S. "survival of the fittest" periods of economic restructuring are so relentless rests on the performance of the Democrats as history's second-most enthusiastic capitalist party. They do not interfere much with capitalist momentum, but wait for excesses and the inevitable populist reaction.

Reforms to the system have been won for two reasons: because people fought for them, and because there was fat on the system to grant them without threatening the wealth of the few.

That's why in the 1960s, the likes of Kennedy and Johnson could promise a few reforms—voting rights, welfare programs, or training programs. Today, in the midst of economic crisis, the Democrats have galloped to the right and focused on austerity, cutbacks and "social responsibility."

The Democrats, as much as the Republicans, have consistently been a party of big business—a party funded by, and beholden to, the masters of industry and commerce in the U.S. And the Democrats, as much of the Republicans, have proven over the last two decades to be a party of war, of racism, of cutbacks in services for the poor and tax breaks for the rich, and of restrictions on abortion rights.

Clinton, as the leader of the party's now-dominant right wing, which deliberately set out to remove the Democrat's liberal image, offers no clear alternative for workers, Blacks, women or gays in the U.S. Like their Republican counterparts, they offer little more than management of the system—at the expense of the majority and in the interests of the tiny minority of the wealthy—of the economic system.

Clinton may be the "lesser evil" in this election. But the lesser evil, after all, is still an evil.

The socialist position on this election can be summed up in the words of socialist leader Eugene Debs: "I'd rather vote for something I want and not get it than vote for something I don't want and get it."

Supporting the Democrats as the liberal alternative that will make a difference is a time-honored tradition on the left—as a short-cut to change. But voting has never been the source of fundamental change in our society. From the Civil War that ended slavery to the unionizing drives of the 1930s to the mass civil rights movement and ghetto rebellions of the 1960s, real reforms have come not from voting, but through mass action from below.

Voting is essentially a passive act. Pulling a lever every four years to decide who will misrepresent you changes very little. And when whole movements turn to an electoral strategy, mass struggles can be derailed and defused. George McGovern, the Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1972, showed that party leaders explicitly count on that outcome when he said: "Our strategy all along was to coopt the movement."

Beyond this, it is also clear that most of the major decisions in society are made outside the control of the mass of the population. For example, the restrictions on abortion rights, U.S. support of the Nicaraguan *contras*, and the decision to launch a war against Iraq all took place despite the fact that polls consistently showed majorities against these policies.

Real power in society comes from control over the means of production, the means of destruction, and the means of disseminating ideas. The wealthiest 1 percent of the population—industrialists, bankers and landlords—control all three, through their ownership of the major corporations and the media and through their control over a state whose primary purpose is to defend their privileges and power.

Ordinary working-class Americans, by contrast, have no say over their working conditions, whether they will be laid off, or whether their wages will be cut. Working people do not elect the top judges, the generals, the police or the bureaucrats who run Washington. And they have no means to control the candidates they do vote for, once they have taken office.

In a debate in 1976, Michael Harrington, then-leader of the Democratic Socialists of America, defended his organization's support for Jimmy Carter, arguing for the conservative Democrat on three grounds: that Carter would be better than Republican Gerald Ford, that the Democrats could be shifted to the left, and that Carter's election would open the way to a "possible radicalization."

On the question of "abortion, the way the courts will handle women, the whole political atmosphere in the U.S., above all, full employment, making real affirmative action possible—the choice is between Carter and Ford, and Carter is much, much better for women," said Harrington.

As we know, Carter's election disproved all three of Harrington's arguments. Carter attacked women's rights, labor and affirmative action.

The kind of argument put forward by Harrington does nothing more than sow illusions in the nature of the Democratic Party—illusions that must be broken if we are to make real changes in the U.S. For that, the working class needs to counter the power of the bosses and its twin parties of capitalism with its own power—the power of mass strikes, of collective action and of organization.

The alternative in November is not to vote Democratic—but to begin the pro-

cess of linking up the many partial struggles against the system—around wages, housing, police brutality, abortion rights—and to connect them to a struggle to transform the whole society.

It means building a movement which not only fights for real reforms, but which seeks to create in the U.S. a society run by the majority—the working class—on the basis of need and not profit.

"The philosophers have merely interpreted the world. The point is to change it."
—Karl Marx

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